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A
SERIOUS ADDRESS
TO THE
RULERS OF AMERICA,
On the Inconsistency of their Conduct respecting
S L A V E R Y.

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SERIOUS ADDRESS

OFFICE OF AMERICA



ST. L. E. R. Y.

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A. R. Farmer

SERIOUS ADDRESS

TO THE
RULERS OF AMERICA,

On the Inconsistency of their Conduct respecting

SLAVERY:

FORMING A CONTRAST

Between the ENCROACHMENTS of England on
American LIBERTY,

AND

American INJUSTICE in tolerating SLAVERY.

"As for me, I will assuredly contend for full and impartial
Liberty, whether my Labour may be successful or vain."

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SERIOUS ADDRESS

RULERS of AMERICA

S. L. A. V. E. R. Y.

Between the ENGLISHMEN of England and
AMERICAN SLAVES



THE NEW YORK

LONDON: Printed by W. J. Phillips, in Great Britain.

A

SERIOUS ADDRESS, &c.

A Sound mind in a sound body, is said to be a state of the highest human happiness individually; when these blessings are separate, a sound mind, wise and prudent conduct, tend much to support and preserve an unsound body. On the other hand, where the body is sound, the constitution strong and healthy, if the mind is unsound, the governing principle weak and feeble, the body feels the injuries which ensue, the health and constitution often become enfeebled and sickly, and untimely death closes the scene. This reasoning holds good politically, being sometimes realized in bodies politick, and perhaps never more so than in the conduct lately exhibited to mankind by Great Britain. Her constitution was sound, strong, and firm, in a degree that drew admiration from the whole world; but, for want of a sound mind, her directing and governing powers being imprudent and unwise, to such a debilitated and sickly state is this fine constitution reduced, that, without a change of regimen, her decease may not be far remote.

America

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America is a child of this parent, who long since, with many severe pangs, struggled into birth, and is now arrived to the state of manhood, and thrown off the restraints of an unwise parent, is become master of his own will, and, like a lovely youth, hath stepped upon the stage of action. State physicians pronounce his constitution strong and sound: the eyes of the world are singularly attentive to his conduct, in order to determine with certainty on the soundness of his mind. It is the general Congress, as the head, that must give the colouring, and stamp wisdom or folly on the counsels of America. May they demonstrate to the world, that these blessings, a sound mind in a sound body, are in America politically united!

It was a claim of freedom unfettered from the arbitrary control of others, so essential to free agents, and equally the gift of our beneficent Creator to all his rational children, which put fleets and armies into motion, covered earth and seas with rapine and carnage, disturbed the repose of Europe, and exhausted the treasure of nations. Now is the time to demonstrate to Europe, to the whole world, that America was in earnest, and meant what she said, when, with peculiar energy, and unanswerable reasoning, she plead the cause of human nature, and with undaunted firmness insisted, that *all mankind* came from the hand of their Creator *equally free*. Let not the world have an opportunity to charge her conduct with a contradiction to her solemn and often repeated declarations; or to say that her sons are not real friends to freedom; that they have been actuated in this awful contest by no higher motive than selfishness and interest, like the wicked servant in the gospel, who, after his Lord had forgiven his debt,

debt, which he was utterly unable to pay, shewed the most cruel severity to a fellow servant for a trifling demand, and thereby brought on himself a punishment which his conduct justly merited. Ye rulers of America beware ! Let it appear to future ages, from the records of this day, that you not only professed to be advocates for freedom, but really were inspired by the love of mankind, and wished to secure the invaluable blessing to all ; that, as you disdained to submit to the unlimited control of others, you equally abhorred the crying crime of holding your fellow men, as much entitled to freedom as yourselves, the subjects of your undisputed will and pleasure.

HOWEVER habit and custom may have rendered familiar the degrading and ignominious distinctions, which are made between people with a black skin and ourselves, I am not ashamed to declare myself an advocate for the rights of that highly injured and abused people ; and, were I master of all the resistless persuasion of Tully and Demosthenes, could not employ it better, than in vindicating their rights as men, and forcing a blush on every American slaveholder, who has complained of the treatment we have received from Britain ; which is no more to be equalled, with ours to negroes, than a barley corn is to the globe we inhabit. Must not every generous foreigner feel a secret indignation rise in his breast, when he hears the language of Americans upon any of their own rights as freemen being in the least infringed, and reflects that these very people are holding thousands and tens of thousands of their innocent fellow men in the most debasing and abject slavery, deprived of every right of freemen, except light and air ? How similar to an atrocious pirate, setting

Setting in all the solemn pomp of a judge, passing sentence of death on a petty thief. Let us try the likeness by the standard of facts.

THE first settlers of these colonies emigrated from England, under the sanction of royal charters, held all their lands under the crown, and were protected and defended by the parent state, who claimed and exercised a control over their internal police, and at length attempted to levy taxes upon them, and, by statute, declared the colonies to be under their jurisdiction, and that they had, and ought to have, a right to make laws to bind them in all cases whatsoever.

AFRICA lies many thousand miles distant, its inhabitants as independent of us, as we are of them; we sail there, and foment wars among them, in order that we may purchase the prisoners, and encourage the stealing one another to sell them to us; we bring them to America, and consider them and their posterity for ever, our slaves, subject to our arbitrary will and pleasure; and if they imitate our example, and offer by force to assert their native freedom, they are condemned as traitors, and a hasty gibbet strikes terror on their survivors, and rivets their chains more secure.

THE American Congress in their declaration, July 1775, say,

"If it were possible for men who exercise their reason to believe that the Divine Author of our

Does not this forcible reasoning apply equally to Africans? Have we a better right to enslave them and their posterity, than Great Britain had to demand Three-pence

existence intended a *part* of the human race to hold an absolute property in, and an unbounded power over others, marked out by infinite goodness and wisdom, as the objects of a legal domination never rightly resistible, however severe and oppressive; the inhabitants of these colonies might at least require from the parliament of Great Britain some evidence, that this *dreadful authority* over them has been granted to that body. But a *reverence* for our great Creator, *principles of humanity*, and the dictates of *common sense*, must convince all those who reflect upon the subject, that government was instituted to promote the welfare of mankind, and ought to be administered for the attainment of that end."

AGAIN they say,—
"By this perfidy (Howe's conduct in Boston) *wives* are *separated* from their *husbands*, *children* from their *parents*, the aged

per pound for an article of luxury we could do very well without? And Oh! America, will not a *reverence* for our great Creator, *principles of humanity*, nor the *dictates of common sense*, awaken thee to *reflect*, how far thy government falls short of impartially *promoting the welfare of mankind*, when its laws suffer, yea, justify men in murdering, torturing, and abusing their fellow men, in a manner shocking to humanity?"

How abundantly more aggravated is our conduct in these respects to Africans, in bringing them from their own country, and separating by sale

and sick from their *relations* and *friends*, who wish to attend and *comfort* them."

"WE most solemnly before GOD and the world declare, that exerting the utmost energy of those powers which our beneficent Creator hath graciously bestowed upon us, the arms we have been compelled by our enemies to assume, we will in defiance of every *bazard*, with unabated firmness and perseverance, employ for the preservation of our liberties, being with one mind resolved to die freemen rather than live *slaves*."

"WE exhibit to mankind the remarkable spectacle of a people at-

these near connections, never more to see each other, or afford the least *comfort* on tender endearment of social life. But they are black, and ought to obey; we are white, and ought to rule.—Can a better reason be given for the distinction, that Howe's conduct is *perfidy*, and ours innocent and blameless, and justified by our *laws*?

Thou wicked servant, out of thine own mouth shalt thou be judged.—Is a claim to take thy property without thy consent so galling, that thou wilt defy every hazard, rather than submit to it? And at the same time hold untold numbers of thy fellow men in slavery, (which robs them of every thing valuable in life) as *firmly rivetted* by thee, as thou art resolved to use the utmost energy of thy power, to preserve thy own freedom?

HAVE the Africans offered us the least *provocation* to make us their

tacked by *unprovoked enemies*, without any imputation, or even suspicion, of offence. — They boast of their privileges and civilization, and yet prefer no milder conditions than *servitude or death*."

"IN our own native land, in defence of the freedom that is our birthright, and which we ever enjoyed till the late violation of it; for the protection of our property acquired solely by the honest industry of our forefathers and ourselves; against violence actually offered, we have taken up arms."

IN a resolve of Congress, October 1774, they say,

"THAT the inhabitants of the English colonies in North-America, by the *immutable laws of nature*, are entitled to life, liberty and property; and they have never ceded to any sovereign power whatever a right to dispose of either without their consent."

enemies? — Have their infants committed, or are they even *suspected* of any offence? And yet we leave them no alternative, but *servitude or death*.

THE unenlightened Africans, in their own native land, enjoyed freedom, which was their birthright, until the more savage Christians transported them by thousands, and sold them for slaves in the wilds of America, to cultivate it for their lordly oppressors.

WITH equal justice may negroes say, By the *immutable laws of nature*, we are equally entitled to life, liberty and property with our lordly masters, and have never ceded to any power whatever, a right to deprive us there-
of.

To the People of Great Britain.

"Know then that we consider ourselves, and do insist, that we are and ought to be, as free as our fellow-subjects in Britain, and that no power on earth has a right to take our property from us without our consent."

"ARE the proprietors of the soil of America less lords of their property than you are of yours? &c.—Reason looks with indignation on such distinctions, and freemen can never perceive their propriety; and yet, however, chimerical and unjust such discriminations are; the Parliament assert, that they have a right to bind us in all cases without exception, whether we consent or not; that they may take and use our property when and in what manner they please; that we are pensioners on their bounty for all we possess, and can hold it no longer than

Does this reasoning apply more forcibly in favour of a white skin than a black one? Why ought a negro to be less free than the subjects of Britain, or a white face in America? Have we not all one Father? Hath not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother? Mal. ii. 10.

Do Americans reprobate this doctrine when applied to themselves? And at the same time enforce it with tenfold rigor upon others, who are indeed *pensioners* on their *bounty* for all they *possess*, nor can they *hold* a single enjoyment of life longer than they *vouchsafe* to *permit*?

they vouchsafe to permit."

"If neither the *voice of justice*, the dictates of the law, the principles of the constitution, or the *suggestions of humanity*, can restrain your hands from shedding human blood in such an *impious* cause; we must then tell you, that we never will submit to be hewers of wood or drawers of water for any ministry or nation on earth. And in future, let *justice* and *humanity* cease to be the boast of your nation?"

To the inhabitants of the colonies.

"WEIGH in the opposite balance, the endless miseries you and your descendants must endure, from an established arbitrary power."

You who have read a description of the inhuman scenes occasioned by the slave-trade, in obtaining, branding, transporting, selling, and keeping in *subjection* millions of human creatures; reflect a moment, and then determine which is the most *impious* cause: and after this, if neither the *voice of justice*, nor *suggestions of humanity*, can restrain your hands from being contaminated with the practice; cease to *boast* the Christian name from him, who commanded his followers "to do unto others as they would others should do unto them."

Who would believe the same persons, whose feelings are so exquisitely sensible respecting themselves, could be so callous toward negroes, and the *miseries* which, by their *arbitrary power*, they wantonly inflict.

Declaration of independence in Congress, 4th July, 1776.

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that *all men* are created *equal*, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain *unalienable rights*; that among these are *life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness*."

Declaration of rights of Pennsylvania, July 15, 1776.

"THAT *all men* are born *equally free* and *independent*, and have certain natural inherent and *unalienable rights*, among which are, the enjoying and defending *life* and *liberty*, acquiring, possessing and protecting *property*, and pursuing and obtaining happiness and safety."

Declaration of rights of Massachusetts, Sept. 1, 1779.

"*All men* are born *free* and *equal*, and have certain natural, essential, and *unalienable rights*; among which may be reckoned

If these solemn *truths*, uttered at such an awful crisis, are *self-evident*: unless we can shew that the African race are not *men*, words can hardly express the amazement which naturally arises on reflecting, that the very people who make these pompous declarations are slave-holders, and, by their legislative, tell us, that these blessings were only meant to be the *rights of white men*, not of *all men*: and would seem to verify the observation of an eminent writer; "When men talk of liberty, they mean their own liberty, and seldom suffer their thoughts on that point to stray to their neighbours."

the right of enjoying and defending their *lives* and *liberties*; that of acquiring, possessing and protecting *property*; in fine, of seeking and obtaining *safety and happiness*."

THIS was the voice, the language of the supreme council of America, in vindication of their rights as men, against imposition and unjust control: Yes, it was the voice of all America, through her representatives in solemn Congress uttered. How clear, full, and conclusive! "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, and endowed by their Creator with the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." "By the immutable laws of nature *all men* are entitled to life and liberty." We need not now turn over the libraries of Europe for authorities to prove, that blacks are born equally free with whites; it is declared and recorded as the sense of America: Cease then ye cruel task-masters, ye perty tyrants, from attempting to vindicate your having the same interest in your fellow men as in your cattle, and let blushing and confusion of face strike every American, who henceforth shall behold advertisements offering their brethren to sale, on a footing with brute beasts.

BUT what shall I say! Forgive it, Oh Heaven, but give ear, Oh earth! while we are execrating our parent state with all the bitterness of invective, for attempting to abridge our freedom, and invade our property; we are holding our brethren in the most servile bondage, cast out from the *benefit* of our *laws*, and subjected to the cruel treatment of the most imperious and savage tempers, without *redress*, without advocate or friend.

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Our rulers have appointed days for humiliation, and offering up of prayer to our common Father to deliver us from *our* oppressors, when sighs and groans are piercing his holy ears from oppressions which we commit a thousand fold more grievous : pouring forth blood and treasure year after year in defence of our own *rights* ; exerting the most assiduous attention and care to secure them by laws and sanctions, while the poor Africans are continued in chains of slavery, as creatures unworthy of notice in these high concerns, and left subject to laws disgraceful to humanity, and opposite to every precept of Christianity. One of these in effect gives fifteen pounds for the murder of a slave ; that is, after a slave has absconded a certain time, twenty pounds is given to any one who shall bring his head, and but five pounds if he is brought alive. Another, which impowers certain officers to seize negroes set free, and sell them for the benefit of government : And, even during the present contest, negroes have been seized with the estates of persons who had gone over to the British, and sold by publick auction into *perpetual slavery*, and the proceeds cast into the stock for the *defence* of *American liberty*. Of the same complexion is an instance in New-Jersey : A female Quaker, about seven years since, manumitted her negroes ; the times having reduced her so, as to be unable fully to discharge a debt for which she was only surety ; the creditor, a great declaimer in behalf of *American freedom*, although he was offered his principal money, obtains a judgment, levies on these free negroes, who, by the assistance of some real friends of freedom, procured a *habeas corpus*, and removed their case before the justices of the supreme court. How many such mock patriots hath this day discovered, whose flinty hearts are as impervious to the

the tender feelings of humanity and commiseration as the nether millstone; can sport with the rights of men; wallow and riot in the plunder, which their unhallowed hands have squeezed from others! But only touch *their* immaculate interests, and what an unceasing outcry invades every ear. A love for my country, a regard for the honour of America, raises an ardent wish, that this picture may never be realized in her rulers.

It may be objected that there are many difficulties to be guarded against in setting of negroes free, and that, were they all to be freed at once, they would be in a worse condition than at present. I admit that there is some weight in these objections; but are not these difficulties of our own creating? And must the innocent continue to suffer, because we have involved ourselves in difficulties? Let us do justice as far as circumstances will admit, give such measure as we ask, if we expect Heaven to favour us with the continuance of our hard earned liberty. The work must be begun, or it can never be completed. "It is begun, and many negroes are set free." True, it is begun, but not in a manner likely to produce the desired *end*, the entire *abolition* of *slavery*. This is the business of the superintending authority, the main spring which gives motion to the whole political machine; which, were they to undertake in good earnest, I have no doubt but we should soon see a period fixed, when our land should no longer be polluted with slave-holders, nor give forth her increase to feed slaves: and indeed it hath been a matter of wonder to many, that that body, who have been so much employed in the study and defence of the *rights* of *humanity*, should suffer so many years to elapse without any effectual movement

in this business. Had they, with the declaration of independence, recommended it to the different Legislatures to provide laws, declaring, that no person imported into, or born in America after that date, should be held in slavery; it would have been a step correspondent with our own *claims*, and, in time, have completed the work, nor can I see any impropriety, but what the nature of the case will justify, to have it still take place.

To shew the necessity of this matter taking its rise at the head, if any thing effectual is done, I may instance the Quakers. Some among them, it is said, always bore a testimony against slavery from its first introduction, and the uneasiness increasing, advices were given forth, cautioning their members against being concerned in importing slaves, to use those well whom they were possessed of, school their children, &c. but some of the foremost of that society having experienced the profits of their labour, no effectual stop could be put to the practice, though many became uneasy, and set their negroes free, until the difficulties attending the late French and Indian war, brought the rights of men into a more close inspection, when a rule was agreed upon, prohibiting their members from being concerned with importing, buying, or selling of slaves; and some years after a further rule was made, enjoining all those who held slaves to set them free, otherwise to be separated from religious membership.—The work was then soon accomplished, and they now say there are very few members belonging to the yearly meeting of Philadelphia who hold a slave.

When a grievance is general, it is but trifling to apply partial means; it is like attempting to destroy a great tree by nibbling at its branches. It is only
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the supreme power, which pervades the whole, that can take it up by the roots. The disquisitions and reasonings of the present day on the rights of men, have opened the eyes of multitudes, who clearly see, that, in advocating the rights of humanity, their slaves are equally included with themselves, and that the arguments which they advance to convict others, rebounds with redoubled force back on themselves, so that few among us are now hardy enough to justify slavery, and yet will not release their slaves; like hardened sinners, acknowledge their guilt, but discover no inclination to reform. It is true these convictions have occasioned the release of many slaves, and two or three states to make some feeble efforts looking that way; but I fear, after the sunshine of peace takes place, we have little more to expect, unless the sovereign power is exerted to finish this sin, and put an end to this crying transgression.

LET me now address that august body, who are by their brethren clothed with sovereign power, to sit at the helm, and give a direction to the important concerns of the American union. You, gentlemen, have, in behalf of America, *declared* to Europe, to the world, "That all men are born equal, and, by the *immutable laws of nature*, are *equally* entitled to liberty." We expect, mankind expects, you to demonstrate your *faith* by your *works*; the sincerity of your *words* by your *actions*, in giving the *power*, with which you are invested, its utmost *energy* in promoting *equal* and *impartial* liberty to *all* whose lots are cast within the reach of its influence; then will you be revered as the real friends of mankind, and escape the execrations which pursue human tyrants, who shew no remorse at sacrificing the ease and happiness of any number of
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their fellow-men to the increase and advancement of their own, are wholly regardless of others rights, if theirs are but safe and secure. We are encouraged in this expectation by the second article of your non-importation agreement in behalf of America, October 1774, viz. "That we will neither import nor purchase any slave imported after the first day of December next, after which time we will wholly discontinue the slave-trade, and will neither be concerned in it ourselves, nor will we hire our vessels, nor sell our commodities or manufactures to those who are concerned in it." And much would it have been for the honour of America, had it been added and confirmed by laws in each state (nor will we suffer such a stigma to remain on our land, as that it can produce slaves, therefore no child, born in any of the United States after this date, shall be held in slavery).—But the children of slaves are private property, and cannot be taken from their masters without a compensation. What! After it hath so often been echoed from America, "All men are born equally free." "No man or body of men can have a legitimate property in, or control over their fellow-men, but by their own consent expressed or implied." Shall we now disown it, in order to hold our slaves? Forbid it all honest men; it is treason against the rights of humanity, against the principles upon which the American revolution stands, and by which the present contest can only be justified; to deny it, is to justify Britain in her claims, and declare ourselves rebels. Wherefore our rulers undoubtedly ought to give these principles, these laws which themselves have declared *immutable*, a due force and efficacy. This every well-wisher to their country, either in a religious or political sense, have a right to ask and expect.

expect. But we have laws that will maintain us in the possession of our slaves: "The fundamental law of nature being the good of mankind, no human sanctions can be good, or valid against it, but are of themselves void, and ought to be resisted." LOCK. Therefore none can have just cause of complaint, should so desirable an event take place, as that no person brought into, or born within any of the United States after the declaration of independence, shall be held a slave.

WHEN I read the constitutions of the different states, they afford a mournful idea of the partiality and selfishness of man; the extraordinary care, and wise precautions they manifest to guard and secure our own rights and privileges, without the least notice of the injured Africans, or gleam of expectation afforded them, of being sharers of the golden fruitage, except in that of the Delaware state, who, to their lasting honour, while they were hedging in their own, provided against the invasion of the rights of others. By the twenty-sixth article of their constitution they resolve, that "No person hereafter imported into this state from Africa, ought to be held in slavery under any pretence whatever; and no negro, Indian or mulatto slave, ought to be brought into this state for sale from any part of the world." Had they went further, and made provision, by which slavery must at length have terminated within their jurisdiction, it would have been doing something to the purpose; and, as this is the only constitution in which posterity will see any regard paid to that abused people, I hope the same humane considerations which led them so far, will induce them to take the lead in doing their part toward putting an effectual

tual end to this crying evil, which will ever remain a stain to the annals of America. *

AND you who in the several states are clothed with legislative authority, and have now an opportunity of displaying your wisdom and virtue by your laws freed from every foreign control, although this people were below notice, and their rights and interest thought unworthy of a sanction in your constitutions; let me beseech you, if you wish your country to escape the reproach and lasting infamy of denying to others what *she* hath so often, and in the most conclusive language, declared were the rights of *all*; if you wish to retain the name of Christians, of friends to human nature, and of looking up acceptably in prayer to the common Father of men, to deal with you in the same tenderness and mercy as you deal with others; that you would even now regard the rigorous oppressions of his other children, and your brethren, which they suffer under laws, which you only can abrogate. View your negro laws calculated not to protect and defend them, but to augment and heighten their calamitous situation! Cast out and rejected by the regulations formed for the defence and security of the rights and privileges, and to guard and improve the morals and virtue of the whites: Left open to the gratification of every passion and criminal commerce with one another, as though they were brutes, and not men; fornication, adultery, and all the rights of marriage union among blacks, considered beneath the notice of those rules

* When this was written, I had, by information, been led to believe, that the late Pennsylvania slave law was very partial and inadequate; but have since learned, that it is a judicious and well contracted law, which provides for the entire abolition of slavery in that state.

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and factions formed to humanize and restrain corrupt nature, or the regard of those whose duty it is to enforce them. Yes, blush Americans! Ye have laws, with severe penalties annexed, against these crimes when committed between whites; but, if committed by blacks, or by white men with black women, with the aggravated circumstances of force and violence, they pass as subjects of mirth, not within the cognizance of law, or magistrates inquiry, and lose the very name of crimes. Hence children often become familiar with these scenes of corruption and wickedness, before they are capable of distinguishing between the duties of Christianity, and the appetites of unrestrained nature. No marvel then if slave-holders are often scourged by the vices of their own offspring, which their untutored slaves have been a means of inflicting—children who, instead of being educated in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, are too often nurtured in pride, idleness, lewdness, and the indulgence of every natural appetite; that, were there no other inducement, this singly is sufficient to cause every real Christian to lift a hand against, and exert their utmost influence in, bringing this hydra mischief to a period. But when we consider the accumulated guilt, in other respects, abundantly set forth by other writers on this subject, brought on this land through the introduction of this infernal traffick, at a time when we were denied the privilege of making laws to check the mighty evil; and that near ten years have now elapsed since this restraint hath been removed, and no effectual advance yet made towards loosing the bands of wickedness, and letting the oppressed go free, or even of putting it in a train whereby it may at length come to an end; I say, it is
a matter

a matter of anxious sorrow, and affords a gloomy presage to the true friends of America. Have we reason to expect, or dare we ask of him, whose *ways* are all *equal*, the continuance of his blessings to us, whilst our *ways* are so *unequal*.

I shall now conclude with the words of Congress to the people of England, a little varied to suit the present subject.

"If neither the voice of *justice*, the dictates of *humanity*, the *rights* of *human nature*, and establishment of *impartial liberty* now in your power, the good of your *country*, nor the fear of an *avenging God*, can restrain your hands from this *impious practice* of holding your fellow-men in *slavery*; making traffick of, and advertising in your publick prints for sale as common merchandize, your *brethren* possessed of immortal souls equal with yourselves; then let *justice*, *humanity*, *advocates for liberty*, and the sacred name of *Christians*, cease to be the *boast* of *American rulers*."

A FARMER.

February, 1783.



F I N I S.

